

WHERE DO I START? (Getting Started)

Designing and implementing an effective transportation/air quality communications program begins by identifying the issue at hand and determining if your organization is the most appropriate one to address it. If your organization is just beginning the process, it is important to assess your current capabilities, the potential benefits and drawbacks of leading such an effort, and potential partners in your community who are available to assist you. This process will help ensure your program is well-planned and strategic in its approach to the problem.

Start by conducting a brainstorming session with your staff and/or other individuals who are knowledgeable of the issue and can provide valuable insight. Following are several questions to help structure your planning. In addition, we have provided examples of answers to these questions. Based on your own community, you may have other responses.

Questions	Examples
What is the issue you want to address?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ High incidence of air pollution in the community \$ Ozone non-attainment status \$ Major traffic congestion
Does your organization have the capacity to address the issue and effect change?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Assess current resources, e.g., staffing, funding, information, time, management support/champion \$ Determine any barriers \$ Answer the question: Are we the best organization to tackle this issue?
What are the primary activities that can be conducted to address the issue?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Conducting media outreach \$ Building a strong community coalition \$ Offering skill-building workshops
What programs and services currently address the issue and how effective are they?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Local organizations working on the same issue \$ National programs and education activities \$ Media coverage of the issue
What has been done in the past?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Contact other local organizations to find out about similar initiatives. \$ Conduct research to find out about other programs and services offered

Questions	Examples
What is the overall goal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ To improve air quality and reduce traffic congestion through collaborative public education efforts of local community groups that support and sustain the public's adoption of effective transportation choices
What are the overall objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ To encourage the use of public transit, van pools and other options that reduce traffic congestion and single-occupant ridership \$ To reduce automobile emissions by setting a target for the percentage of people who drive alone to work \$ To motivate solo drivers to consider taking other modes of transportation \$ To motivate automobile drivers to maintain their vehicles
What audience(s) is most affected by the issue?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ General public \$ Driving public \$ People with respiratory disorders, the elderly, children
What are their perceived needs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Survey members of the target audience(s) \$ Talk to individuals/organizations that target the same audience
What are the desired outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Solo drivers will take the bus once a week instead of driving alone \$ Increase percent age of drivers who regularly maintain their cars
After developing a communications plan, including all program tasks, a timetable, staffing and budget issues, evaluation methods, and partnerships, determine what strategy will be implemented to address issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Focus communications on drivers who do not carpool \$ Focus communications on women who don't maintain their vehicles. Survey members of the target audience(s)

Information Resources

Not all of the answers to these questions will be immediately available. You may need to take time to research the answers before moving forward. Some examples of places to turn for information on transportation/air quality issues nationally and in your community include:

- \$ Library and Internet searches
- \$ Sources of transportation and environmental statistics (e.g., state departments of transportation, local transit authorities, environmental groups)
- \$ Government agencies, universities
- \$ National clearinghouses
- \$ Advertising and public relations agencies, newspapers, radio and television stations (for media use data)
- \$ Industry organizations
- \$ Polling companies (for audience knowledge and attitudes)

Leveraging What's Already Being Done

In reviewing these questions, you may discover that your agency does not have sufficient resources or expertise to implement a transportation/air quality public education and information initiative on its own, and that you require assistance from other agencies or organizations in your community. Or you may learn that the target audience is already served by several other organizations in your area, and that it is more cost-effective and efficient to reach the target audience through these other agencies. Find out what they have learned to date regarding the issue, any “lessons learned” they feel are important for you to know, what actions are still needed, and if there are opportunities for your organizations to work together in the future.